MICROCOSM

2010

Volume XXXVII

Microcosm XXXVII
is dedicated to the
2010 Literary Hall of Fame recipient

Mrs. Edna Earle Crews

"Revise! Revise! Revise!" Whether it be English Composition or Creative Writing, "revise" was a favorite word of Mrs. Edna Earle Crews when she was instructing students in the skill of writing. One can easily picture her in retirement, striking a yoga pose and using that word as her mantra for meditation: "Re…vise….ohm…re…vise…ohm."

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Absorbing the rural landscape of Winona, Mississippi, may have been an early indicator of literary things to come; being named Edna Earle, not because of, but before, Eudora Welty's literary "Edna Earle" almost certainly prophesied her destiny. Edna Earle Patridge would grow to love literature and writing, and she would dedicate most of her life to doing so. After graduating from Winona High School in 1955, Edna Earle earned her Associate of Arts Degree from Holmes Junior College in 1957. She continued her education at Mississippi College where she earned her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in 1959 and 1964, respectively. In 1949, she began teaching in Jackson Public Schools, remaining there six years until taking a teaching position at Copiah-Lincoln Community College in 1966. In the fall of 1968, she and husband, Raiford Crews, built their home in Crystal Springs where they have since lived.

During her years at Co-Lin, Edna Earle promoted literature and learning on both the state and regional levels. Her literary initiatives led to the creation of this publication, *Microcosm*, as well as "Bits & Pieces," and she was also the editor of the *Junior College Writer*. In addition, she served on many committees and was involved in several state and regional organizations as a way of promoting writing; in addition to the writing-related organization, like Mississippi Council for Teachers of English and the Southeastern Conference of Teachers of English in the Two-Year College, Edna Earle was the co-sponsor of the College Republicans from 1997-2000 and the Campus Coordinator for The University of Mississippi Writing-to-Learn for Faculty Development Project—1988-1989.

Edna Earle made a difference in the lives of her students. If a student was not better off for having been in her presence, he or she simply did not want to be. She not only taught them how to write, she wrote her-

self as can be seen in her many publications, which included essays, poems in such prestigious publications as *Comraderie, Mississippi Poetry Journal, Oxford So & So*, and *The Tombigbee Country Magazine* and chapter in a book about Mississippi public junior and community colleges.

Most remarkably, Edna Earle continues to make a difference. While she may have retired from Co-Lin, clearly she will never retire from her literary life. She is active in the Area Fifty-Plus Club for whom she writes articles for county newspapers, has begun a writing class for Golden Days, a senior adult ministry of First Baptist Church in Crystal Springs, and had a pro-life article published in *The Baptist Record* while serving as a trustee on the Christian Action Commission.

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When she is not setting words to paper, Edna Earle and her husband, Raiford, can be found setting out azaleas, roses, and blueberry bushes as well as other flowers and shrubs at their home in Crystal Springs. So while she may not be doing yoga, it is certain that whether she is writing her memoirs or landscaping her yard, Edna Earle is forever in a state of revision.

Photographer:
Kim Singletary

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Where I Am From

Robbie Case

I am from a small quaint town
There are only two red lights
Town closes at noon on Wednesdays
The curb market is the local hang out for all the old men
Everyone knows your name—that could be a bad thing
Going to school with the same people all your life
Church on Sunday and Wednesday Night
Fried chicken at Grandmas after church on Sundays
Families gathering every holiday
Being there to lend a hand when one of your neighbors is in need
Sitting on the river bank catching catfish so fast your bait hardly gets wet
Friday night is high school football
Driving thirty miles to the mall
Bon fires on Halloween
Fried green tomatoes and boiled peanuts
Pine trees glistening in the morning light
Sitting on the porch at the end of the day
listening to the whippoorwill sing his song
That is where I am from

Hungry

Britney Ashworth

I am hungry

Not needing food hungry

Not starving for that yummy chocolate pie, hungry

Not like the people down in Africa

But hungry for my God

Hungry that I need Him more than ever

Hungry that I want to be closer to Him

Hungry that I need to give back to Him

God's Tears

Ashley Allison

Cries out loud for his children
To come home to his kingdom
To welcome them home
God's tears
He truly fears
That some would not make it on their own
The love that he holds for each
For his love he puts them in situations
But for some truly faithful
Each day has just begun
To see that some of his children are falling
Some of his children are calling
Through prayer
God's tears
Falls in all his children hearts
Everybody stands still
To listen to the heart of God
As it beats steady, yet firm

Photographer:
Kim Singletary

Photographer: Katie Sprouse

Teenagers

Jeani Davis

They cannot remember to turn off a light.
They are the only ones who are right.
They dress like they have bad sight.
They won't pick up; it's a never-ending plight.
They don't want to hear it; you'll just end up in a fight.
They break your things, but you say it's alright.
They do the dumbest things, making you think they're not bright.
They think they can stay out with friends all night.
They are safe at home now; you can sleep without fright.

Second-to-Last

Shauntisia Kees'

Through the doors my body walked
My mind fought to go any place else
Thinking about the moment hurts
So bad, I cannot even allow myself to view
The body of a woman I've known all my life
I go to the lobby to just sit and socialize instead
Dreading the second-to-last time I'm going to see her face
While the people talk I just put on a fake smile
Because all I can think about is her face
Full of laughter and grace
The time has come for our second-to-last view
My heart pounding every step that I took
I tried to keep myself together
Each second worsens as I get closer to the body
I could feel my eyes fill with tears
Finally I entered the small, dim lit room
There, she is all still and stiff
Inside an ivory colored casket with silver lining
Her face was all done up, not looking like her
I was too scared to even move my mouth
The ushers had us to sit, which I really didn't want to do
Facing towards her in the front of the room
A deacon decides to tell a short story
Just having to stare at her really scorns my soul
The preacher is finally saying a prayer that seems to last forever
And all I can see with my eyes closed tight
Is the image of my Aunt Earnestine.

A Mother's Day

Robbie Case

Sitting on the porch in my old wooden rocking chair
watching the golden sun rise over the green tops of the
pines growing tall in my front yard.
The house is quiet to my surprise. I try to enjoy the
tranquility but my mind keeps racing around all the
mundane choirs I must do. There is a sink full of dishes from
the day before, food still stuck on them just waiting to be scrubbed.
A pile of clothes too tall to see over lurking in the laundry room,
just waiting to be washed. The dust is so thick on the table the kids
have written their name in it, but yet no one wants to lend a helping hand.
A Mother's Day
As I think of all the things I need to do,
my house suddenly turns into a zoo.
My nine year old has climbed on top of the couch and proceeded to swing
from the curtain like a monkey in the jungle swinging from a vine. Just
about that time, he hits the floor, my curtains are no more. While
the two older ones are creeping around like two tigers ready to pounce,
fighting over the last bit of milk left in the house. Am I a zookeeper or a
mother? Today I do not know. The TV plays loudly from one room while
a radio screams from another. Now my sanctuary is filled with gloom.
I want to beat them with my broom. Or I could just lock them in
their rooms. Now that the silence has gone away, I have to begin my
crazy day. Sometimes I wish I could just run far away—even just for a
day. But I am afraid they would tear the house down all the way.
Now I am back in my old rocking chair, watching the sun sink slowly
behind the roof of the house. I have tried all day to hear myself think,
maybe I should have a drink or
let Calgon take me away and bring me home on a quieter day.

The Abusive Lover

Ashley Allison

The abusive lover
Every time I see him I would hide for cover
He would abuse me if I don't do right
But tonight
The fights that would break out
As we would scream and shout
The rage that his fist would hold
As he will kick me out of my own house into the cold
Try to run, try to hide
He had other women on the side
The muscle grows stronger and stronger as he pulls out my hair
Half the time he would say sorry as if he really cares
Then the fights would start all over again
As he slammed my fragile body to floor
Knock my face into the door
I try to break to free
As he swing his fist into an angry rage
I block him off
Before he could go to the next stage
After we broke up
He still would not let me be
I still have not recovered
From that abusive lover

Grandmamma Dearest

Ashley Allison

Can't you see the errors of your ways
The way you speak and think
Abuses the people all around you
What you heard and what you say
Affects me too
Can't you see what is going in your own eyes
The things you did to our family
Don't you realize
As the days goes by
I love you so much; I just stand by your side
When others turn their backs
I was there to pick up the pieces
And I try not to cry
The foolishness between you and them to cease
All I want is our family to be in peace
When your family's in need
Do we pay you back for your services
Can't you hear our voices
Crying out for you
Especially me
For you to talk about them
Saying we cannot comprehend
For us to truly understand
Now that our family has broken apart
I'm picking up the pieces of my heart
For you to see what going on in their life
When we turn to you
We feel as though you stab us with knives
You act as though we fear you
But can't you see this isn't right or true
I couldn't be the least clearest
Talk to us Grandmamma Dearest

Tooth Fairy

Jeani Davis

How dare you forget to come.

What am I going to tell my son?

Maybe, he will believe,

You were just too busy to get to everyone.

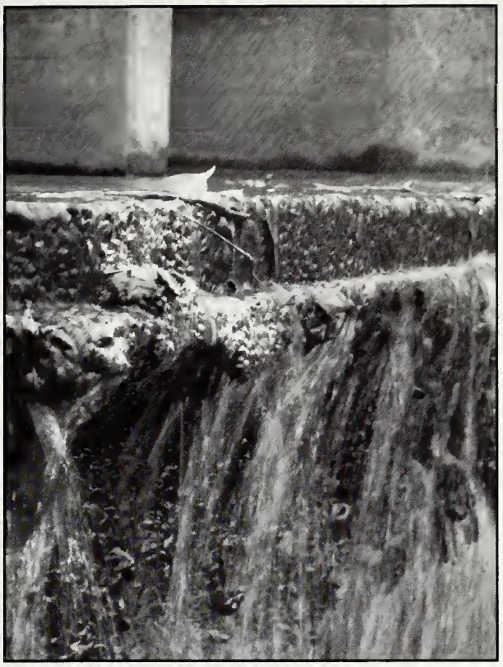
His older sister is laughing.

"See I told you there wasn't one."

Who was it that said,

Being a mom is a lot of fun?

Photographer: Katie Sprouse



My Betta Fish: My Heart's Delight

Heather Case

Rainbows of the rice fields;
Swirling, dancing, shimmering;
Waiting for their evening meal;
Flashing, gleaming, glimmering;

Isolated side by side;
Floating, drifting, gliding;
They fan their fins and swell with pride;
Challenging, strutting, fighting;

Plastic dividers keep them from harm;
Swimming; wriggling; waving;
Their feisty spirit is part of their charm;
Fanning; snapping; waiting.

Sleepless Dreams

Jeani Davis

Daydreaming, I wonder the difference between a hobbit and a gnome.

I picture their cute tiny houses with a wooden gate.

With a moss-covered roof in the shape of a dome.

Let's try to catch one: We must put out some bait.

We did it, now we have one of our very own.

They fell for the trap—their curious trait.

Voices

Ashley Allison

Voices
Could not be heard
As they speak out
As their words are free
And roaming about
Into one ear and through, out the other
It's like your words could not reach any further
During this our mouths are silent
Words cannot escape
Or either they cannot be heard
Silent is a lonely bird
They try to make themselves heard
Yet their words trap
Or they try to have people listen
Is there words amissing
Yet they make certain sounds
But their words have no bounds
During every little action
Their words escape the human mind
In a pool of emptiness
Those lonely words—nothing but a sound
Their freedom of speech is limited
Because they can't give simple choices
This poem is called voices

Forever Gone

Robbie Case

The bells tolled loudly from the church tower
He walked slowly in the fog to the door
His life had drastically changed forevermore
She had always been his strength and power
Two days ago he lost her at this exact hour
They found her face down on the floor
Now he knew he had to even the score
She was laid to rest under the bower

The report said she had died by her own hand
They had no evidence of foul play
As he stood outside in the sand
He knew there had to be some other way
The police tried to say he was the man
He vowed they would wreak the day
As he searched all over the land
He said, "When I find who did this they will pay"

In A Moment's Time

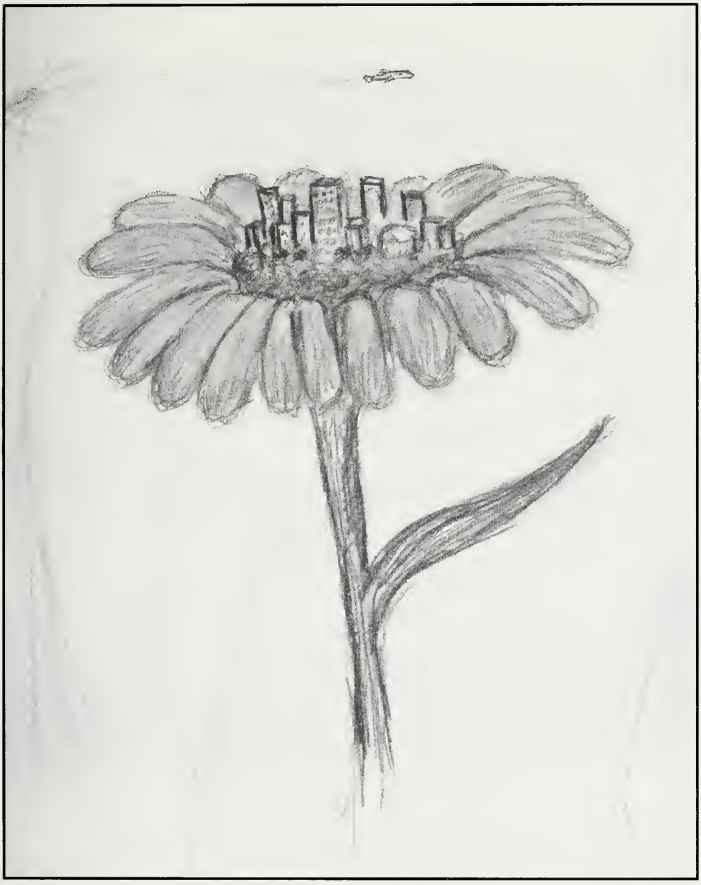
Britney Ashworth

In a moment's time
Everything changes, rearranges.
Life is stuck in overdrive
And those changes aren't that recognized.
It seems like life is long, but short.
Today you're twenty-one;
Tomorrow you're eighty-one.
I can't believe the time;
How one minute ticks slowly
And an hour flies by.
Your childhood; the moment left behind.
The teenage years were fun and gone,
And now you're independent and on your own.
Bills and a reality check;
Hey! Life's too short, but you're not dead.
Those who you love are gone away,
But those born, brand new begin each day.
Watching little ones takes you back
To the time when you were in their shoes.
In that moment's time, missing;
Missing who you once were;
Realizing what you've become.
The challenges in life, the falters, the good times;
Molding, sculpting the person outside and in.
It's all in a moment's time
That changes a person.
Even though time is gone,
Live life, life that's precious,
And don't underestimate it.
Take it as a gift, a blessing,
Because it's in a moment's time.

Outgoing

Shauntisia Kees

Will there ever be a day
Where I won't rock and sway
From the loss I just had
The closer to people I get
I always seem to fret
Pushing them all away
Can I ever get back the friendships I once obtained
Back before bad news started to reign
They say living in the past just hurts
Day in, day out is such a hassle
Doubt I'll ever receive another graduation tassel
My friends are blooming into fabulous lives
Just trying gives me hives
I want to be more like them
I'm beef jerky; they are Slim Jim
I'm one of many passionate souls of this world
While they have more movement than a squirrel
They can go out to movies and parties
But the most fun I've had is being home eating Smarties
Everyone always says I need to get out more to find a man
These days guys just want a woman who will eat out his hand
Not me, that's not how I carry myself
Aren't many of us like that left
Whatever happened to the days of liking what was on the inside
Because what you see on the outside, is not what matches on the inside.



Illustrator: Jaime Benge

Love Poem

Courtney Carter

I'm stressing out today
And you have the nerve to ask me why
Because its your birthday! I scream
So! You scream back
You hate to see me like this.
Wiping sweat from my brow, clenching my fists
I'm trying to make it perfect.
Like a painter on his masterpiece, I'm formulating a plan
I wring my hands.
"Baby, calm down" you say
I look at you then turn away.
You don't get why I was upset when I burned the cake
Or why I was mad when the picture didn't take
Or why I screamed when the present I bought you decided to break
Because I love you.
"Baby don't be so upset" you say
"Because today is already a beautiful day
I'm thankful that God let it be this way"
Why? I said tearfully.
He just smiles
"Because I love you"
And so he wipes the tears from my eyes
And instead of cake we eat moon pies
And instead of pictures we make animals with the clouds in the skies
And dream we are on trains as we hear them pass by.

Illustrator: Christopher Wall

Short Fiction

Paper Birds

Brittany Bernard

I had been in the cancer ward of the hospital for ten years now. That would mean I was twenty-five, but when you are in a hospital, time suddenly slows down. It feels like the sands in the hour glass begin falling, one grain at a time, which is ironic because when you are in the cancer ward you are constantly told through hushed words and gapping silences that you have no time left. As if saying aloud that you had no time left put it into concrete words that would strike you dead that very instant. So, perhaps I am still fifteen, ready to go off to high school, ready for crushes, first dates and proms. Maybe time slowed down outside the hospital, and it was still the season with fresh cut grass, ice cream, and all the other subtle pleasantries of summer. Maybe I had only aged ten years inside this time-warped world of sterilization, needles, and IV drips. Maybe when I was released, I would be right back to playing softball with my best friend, Devlan.
Devlan had a way of bringing sunshine with her. She was bubbly without gray days, and her spirits matched her neon beads and bangles. Her freshly squeezed lemon juice blonde hair was always kept in a messy bun, and her light blue eyes were always dancing with mischief and a slight exotic mystery that drew you in like a magnet. She had an untamable wildness about her, as if she would go galloping off with the wind if you tried to catch her. The only things wilder than her hair and clothes were her ideas. She would spin around, dragging her wild ideas up until they floated right in front of you, and you had no choice but to do as she said. All of her ideas, no matter how zany, seemed palpable and real, like the realest, truest thing you knew.

When I first arrived, there were hundreds of faces inquiring about me leaving me a menagerie of Get Wells. Cards with squiggly writing and witty words, flowers with big wide faces and bright colors, and balloons with ducking bobbing heads all filled my room until the small pale blue room was covered entirely. But slowly the ink faded and the flowers wilted. Soon no one came to see me except my family, which kept thin tight sociable smiles and politely inquired with folded hands about how I felt and if I met anyone new and Devlan.

It was as if I had disappeared from the world. Maybe I did. Maybe this hospital was in a parallel world. You could get to it, you could see it, but you didn't want to be there. You preferred your own reality that wasn't filled with sorrow or sickness. You avoided the hospital because you might get

lost in this parallel world, and once you get lost, it was hard to find your way back.

If Devlan noticed my IV drips and bandages, she didn't say nor did her body language indicate otherwise. The boring, monotonous life of hospitalization left as soon as she entered the doors. She made no mention of it when she came up to my room. She simply brought various papers and stories of the outside world. These stories were my only link to the outside world; they were the only thing that tied me to the other reality. The reality of wellness. The only other thing that was able to do that was the paper birds we made together.

Devlan would climb all the stairs, stories in her head and mounds of brightly colored paper in her hands, and whirl into the room and plop herself right down, and we would start. She was the one who taught me all of the folds. Despite her messy appearance and flippant ways, she had a very precise fold to her paper. She would concentrate with a furrowed brow and fold with such a deft, stable hand that it would seem she was making the world rather than a bird. Her crisp, perfectly folded ones always looked better compared to my loose, lumpy ones. She didn't care; she would smile her Cheshire smile and place them right beside all the others that had taken the place of the balloons, flowers, and cards.

The pale blue wallpaper made my collection of hanging birds look like they were flying. When I was too weak to lift my head and no one else would be around, I would stare at the birds in my sky, the sky I created in my own little world inside of the two others.

The birds would dance in the ventilation and would rustle when they bumped against each other. I imagined them to be cawing, crying out for me to fly right up there with them out of the window and to tour the world that I was only able to see through television and magazines.

One day, Devlan stopped coming. I believed she really did gallop off into the wind. Maybe she got sick of visiting the parallel universe. Maybe she spun off her own place in a forgotten corner of the world. I could not tell when it happened. I could not tell if it was just one day that had passed since her abandoning run or one year. Maybe it was more than one year. Time could keep going whether it was the hands of a clock moving or the numbers of a digital clock flipping, but that didn't tell me anything. The same numbers and positions happened twice a day. How many twice-a-days had it been? I didn't know, and I had no way of finding out.

I laid my heavy head on my pillow and closed my eyes. My breath sounded raspy to my ears; my body felt like lead. Outside I could hear the soft mumble of ice hitting the pavement below indicating a sure sign of winter, but inside my mind it was summer again. Yes, I could see it all.

There was laughter from the neighbor's kids. There was the sweet sound of an ice cream truck. I could feel the anticipation as I slid the hot coins into his hands. I could feel the cold rush of hose water.

Then suddenly, my body lifted up. Up it went high into the sky, hovering above the street below it. The children looked like ants and soon even the clouds were below my feet. I closed my eyes against the frightening experience. Then I heard it lowly, a bare whisper against the wind. Caw. I kept my eyes tightly closed afraid of the sure plummet below me.
Caw.

The sound was stronger then. It vibrated all around me and shook something deep inside me. I opened my eyes with wideness. Around me were my paper birds. They were flying beside me as we loped and riveted through the clouds. Soon they all morphed into feathers and attached themselves to my body. They felt warm against me, like a cocoon of safety.

I could feel myself changing slowly as well. There was no pain. I felt like I slipped into a new soft dress. I had become a bird too. I gave my newly formed wings one last spread and threw my new head into the sun's gentle light as I made my journey around the world with a rainbow of glittering paper birds in my wake.

Photographer: Kim Singletary

Purified by Fire: The End of Zhephyr's Quest

Heather Case

This certainly was to be the end of all things. The north tower of the ancient castle trembled and shook, sending chunks of stone the size of a large shield raining down on the company like an avalanche. Screeching swirls of dark magic twined feverishly about the tower like a great, black cyclone. Everywhere, papers and chairs and all manner of matter were hurled through the air as if they had taken on a life of their own. The floor tiles burst asunder, revealing a glowing red chasm in the earth, casting its fiery glow across the chamber floor and through the great rents in the tower walls, making the snowy landscape outside look like a bloody battlefield. Zhephyr and his companions were right in the middle of it all.

The four of them had traveled relentlessly through blazing deserts, frigid tundra, and haunted forests for this one purpose: to track down the wicked Dark Sorcerer, Zhar'roc, and defeat him, thus saving all the lands from darkness and death at his wicked hands. It was Zhar'roc who had conjured the deadly plague that had swept throughout the lands like wildfire, striking down and eventually killing anyone who was not a magic wielder. The sorcerer's evil scheme was for all the magic wielders to agree to swear allegiance to him in exchange for him stopping the plague. Beyond that, no one could guess what dreadful deeds he had plotted.

However, the magic wielders of the world had thus far not shown any inclination to ally themselves with Zhar'roc, and the rulers of the various lands waited in prayer for the four travelers to return with news of victory. At the moment, however, it did not appear that their prayers would be answered.

The young wizard, Syennah, was frantically trying to cast her strongest paralysis spell on the sorcerer's army of attacking Dire wolves, her long, silvery-blue hair damp with perspiration and her silver robe stained with blood from many bite wounds.

Fighting by her side was her childhood companion, Kendric, the elemental swordsman. His armor, though covered in the grime of battle, still reflected the blazing light of his war sword, ignited with vibrant flames from the excitement of the fight. His red-gold hair caught the color of the flames and the glow from the chasm in the floor, making him look like a crazed fire-fiend coming up from the bowels of the earth. The wolves

yelped in terror at his fierce countenance.

Even Gyer, the overly-optimistic, nonsensical, masked shape-shifter was doing his part. He flitted here and there among the ranks of the goblins guarding the stairway, one moment appearing as a wolf, the next as a goblin, the next as a small girl, until the goblins were attacking one another in their confusion. The stairs now unguarded, Zhephyr made a dash for them, saluting Gyer in thanks as he passed by. Gyer, now in his original six-foot-four body, cape swirling, white mask gleaming, drew his claymore sword and charged in to assist Syennah and Kendric with the wolves.

Zhephyr was clinging to the crumbling walls for dear life as the earth-splitting tremors shook the staircase from the wall it had been anchored to for centuries beyond count. The hail of dislodged stones continued to pelt both him and the walls, leaving gaping rents in his black leather armor and weakening the staircase. Blood matted the young man's purplish-black hair and dripped into his amber-colored eyes, blinding him as he leapt up the stairs two by two in a frantic, yet determined attempt to survive long enough to end this reign of evil.

At long last, exhausted and in pain, but resolute, Zhephyr reached the top floor of the tower, where he knew his destiny awaited. Knowing that his friends were fighting for their lives hundreds of feet below him, Zhephyr took a deep, trembling breath and stepped toward the doorway, more than ready to end this battle. Behind that door was the source of the darkness that had overshadowed the multitudes of innocent lives for far too long.

For Zhephyr, however, this was not only the task of ridding the world of its most evil entity. For him, this quest would do far more than either make him a hero or end his unhappy life of loneliness and self-loathing. What took place on the other side of that door would very likely change who he was forever.

Zhephyr reached for the door. He could hear Zhar'roc chanting his foul incantations on the other side, fully aware that the dark spells were not needed for him to defeat Zhephyr's friends; he was doing it out of spite. As another tremor rocked the tower, Zhephyr opened the door and burst into the room. Zhar'roc turned around slowly, his long black beard streaked with silver and swirling in the fierce winds he had conjured. His dark hood was thrown back, revealing his hard, ageless face and cold black eyes. His thin mouth twisted into a cruel smirk at the site of his visitor. Then, with a voice like a thousand demons, Zhar'roc spoke:

"Welcome, Zhephyr. Long have I awaited your arrival."

Time seemed to stand still as Zhephyr replied, "At long last we meet, Father."

Down below, having bought him the time he needed to ascend the stairs, Zhephyr's companions continued to fight their way through the masses to rush to the aid of their friend.

Kendric, sword blazing, set fire to the remaining Dire wolves as he helped Syennah, who had been badly bitten, to her feet. Chunks of smoldering stone continued to rain down as the tower fell to pieces.

"Can you walk, Syennah?" cried Kendric over the noisy tumult. Syennah, obviously near fainting, smiled bravely as she leaned on Kendric's arm.

"I'll be fine; we must hurry to Zhephyr. He cannot be allowed to face such danger alone." Kendric looked at the girl. She was of a courageous heart, but there was no way she would make it up collapsing stairs in her weakened state. He had to act quickly.

"Gyer!" he shouted. "Help! Get us to the top!"

Meanwhile, on the top floor, father and son stood motionless as cold black eyes were met by golden ones. While the winds outside swirled madly, the room around them stood still, as though the tension of the moment had sucked all the air from the chamber like a vacuum. It was Zhar'roc who broke the silence that had ensued.

"You look so much like your mother." He smiled cruelly as he said this. Zhephyr flinched, remembering how he had been told his mother was treated by the sorcerer. Still, he remained silent. He would not allow Zhar'roc to provoke him.

"Well, my son," crooned Zhar'roc, "have you nothing to say to the father you finally are able to meet? Tell me, why have you come? Do you wish to learn the Dark Arts and carry on my legacy?" Zhar'roc laughed. Zhephyr decided to speak.

"Zhar'roc," he began, "though I called you 'Father' just now, the title was not meant to imply any feelings of endearment on my part. Not only have you ruined my life with the accursed dark magic you passed into my veins, making me hated and feared, an outcast of society, but you have also ruined the lives of countless others with your evil. For that, I shall defeat you."

Zhar'roc's laughter shook the tower to its core. "You, a powerless weakling, defeat me?" Suddenly, the laughter stopped. Zhar'roc's cold black eyes took on an eerie red glow. "I think not," he said. The sorcerer raised his arms as he began to chant. The air, set in motion once more, turned cold. The tremors ceased. A slick, black ice began to creep swiftly down the walls and across the floor towards Zhephyr. Before he could move, the ice had latched onto his feet like iron claws.

"Now," Zhar'roc hissed, "I'll finish you, whelp! No one shall stand

against me!" Zhar'roc reached for his staff. Zhephyr's mind was racing. He had sworn never to use the magic within him... yet now... now...

"Aargor'nath!" From the depths of his soul, Zhephyr cried out the ancient word for light, not knowing what would happen, only following the guidance of his heart. Blinding streaks of light shot across the room, crackling and burning away the very essence of the darkness like flames licking up oil. Zhar'roc, engulfed by a blinding white fire, leapt shrieking from the chamber window as the light consumed his dark soul.

Zhephyr stood still as the light caressed him, burning away the darkness deep inside. The tower began to topple into the chasm below as the light burned away its dark foundations.

"Surely now, I shall die," thought Zhephyr, mesmerized by an unknown feeling: peace. "Here at the end of my life, the darkness that has plagued me for so long has finally been vanquished. I am finally freed of my inner darkness. I have been purified by fire; my soul belongs to Heaven..." He closed his eyes and sighed with contentment as he thought what he believed would be his last thoughts on earth.

Suddenly, with a sound like thunder, the roof burst open as Gyer, in the form of a gigantic white eagle, came swooping down and caught Zhephyr up in his talons. As Gyer soared up into the safety of the sky, what remained of the tower exploded in a dazzling flash of white flames and disintegrated, the ashes raining down into the chasm as it closed shut, sealing Zhar'roc and his evil within the pits of hell forever.

Zhephyr climbed onto Gyer's back, where he was met by his other companions.

Gyer cried out joyfully: "Well, Master Zhephyr, how does it feel to know you saved the world, eh?" Zhephyr only smiled; a gesture that came surprisingly easy for one who had never done so before. Syennah, weak and exhausted, but overjoyed at what they had accomplished, clasped her hands in a prayer of thanks; Kendric sheathed his sword and joined her. An evil that had darkened all the lands for so long had been vanquished; now, there would be true joy in the hearts of men. After they had flown in peaceful silence for some time, it was Zhephyr who finally found words to sum up what they were all feeling.

"For the first time," he said, "we are truly going home."

River Calling

Brenda Temple

Gray clouds fill the early winter sky, and a wind blows my hair from my face. Traffic on the bridge over head keeps a rhythmic pace as it crosses from town to town. The waves of the mighty Mississippi call my name, beckoning me, "Come, Batela, come." The wind blows my hair again pushing my t-shirt and red pants back against my body.

"Come, Batela, come." I take another step forward.

"Yes, come!" the river coaxes.

With another step forward, the waters reach my calves.

"Batela..." the wind pleas with me not to listen.

"Come," the river chants. "Come and surrender yourself to me."

I take another icy step forward, and my raised pants legs get wet as the waves come in, greeting. The wind continues to softly beg me not to take another step, but the river welcomes me.

My bare toes dig into the mud beneath the murky brown surface of the wild waters. The current of the waters pull me forward, ever so slightly. The water to my knees sends chills through my body that numb my broken heart.

The wind calls again with familiar voices. I go to take another step when there is a sudden, frantic splash behind me, and a set of arms hastily wrap around my waist. My eyes come off of the beckoning waters as I try to see who has grabbed me. The strong arms of a strange man are pulling me from the waters and back to the safety of the river's edge. When free of the water's icy grip, the man picks me up, and the wind blows fiercely against my frozen legs.

Only now do I realize I felt no wind though it had never stopped, and the traffic overhead never ceased its river crossing. As my legs are dried, I see my betrayer's mother and father and two brothers. Then my eyes fall on him, and I long for the river once more, but the river no longer calls to me. My rescuer stands, waiting to know I am alright. When I stand to shake his hand, he pulls me into a tight embrace and mutters a quick prayer. When he finishes and releases me, I look around at the upset people coming my way, all wanting their own personal confirmation.

The wind sighs in my ears thanking me.

"Batela."

Photographer: Kim Singletary

Essays

A Phenomenon of Nature

A Narrative Essay By Heather Phillips

It was a bright, sunny day in the summer of 2004. Birds were singing, children were playing, and the wind was blowing peacefully through the trees. It seemed like any ordinary day, but for me, this would be the day that would change my life forever.

My mother and I had just gotten out of bed when suddenly we heard a loud, crashing noise. We dashed outside to find out what it was, but we could not see anything. When we went back inside the house, we started to smell smoke. All of a sudden, we saw that our den at the back of the house was on fire. I will never forget seeing the blazes of the hungry flames racing up the curtains.

Agitated and confused, my mother and I ran outside as quickly as we could. Almost immediately, I could see the huge, red fire trucks racing down the street. Firemen hurriedly appeared from all different directions. Strangely, from then on, everything seemed to move in slow motion. As I saw the huge black clouds of smoke cover my house like a dark shadow, all I could think of was that I was in a horrible, unending nightmare that I could never wake up from.

The fire was eventually put out, but the air still smelled like burnt charcoal ash. The house that stood before me did not look like the house that had been my home for twelve years.

As I walked back into my charred house, it seemed as if I was walking into a dark, hazy fog. The walls were covered with heavy, black ash so thick that I could not even tell what color it was before. The carpet was now a mixture of brown and gray. When I walked across it, it felt like I was walking through a swampy wetland. Everything inside the house was drenched in water. The whole house smelled like a campfire that had been cooled off by the rain. My TV and computer were nothing but a blob of plastic. Candlestick holders that once stood up right had melted into a bent, crooked shape. The flames of the fire were so hot that they melted my mother's driver's license into the wood of the table.

The item that I was most saddened to lose was my collection of porcelain dolls. When I found them, their bodies were completely demolished, and their faces were broken into a thousand pieces. The smiles that had been on their faces were forever gone.

I turned to my mother and said, "I am afraid that my smile may be like my dolls' and may not come back again for a long time."

After finding that my dolls had been destroyed, I was afraid of

what I was going to find next. Instead of finding the worst, I found that my grandmother's baby doll bed that she has given me was still completely intact, and my baby quilts that were in a chest were untouched as well. The smile that I thought was lost began to resurface once again.

One of the most amazing things we discovered was that only one of our many books had not been destroyed, our Bible. I found it laying on the table completely untouched.

Eventually, the fire marshal came over and told my family and me how the fire started. He said that the fire was caused by a large limb from our neighbor's tree falling on a power line and breaking it into. The electricity from the power line, which contained twenty thousand volts, ran down our cyclone fence and struck the side of the house causing the back den curtain to catch on fire.

The fire marshal turned to us and said, "This occurrence was a phenomenon of nature, and I have only seen this happen one other time in my whole career."

At that point of the turmoil, I wondered what life would be like without my home and my treasured things, such as my porcelain doll collection which I had collected through the years with much delectation. With a tear streaming down my right cheek, I felt that my world had been shattered in a way that I never imagined.

After a few months, life began to take a turn for the better. I saw God turn a horrible situation into something wonderful by helping my family and me find a more beautiful home and by making our lives richer with happiness in more ways than one.

God taught me many valuable lessons that day. First, He taught me to never take anything for granted because it can be taken away at any time. Most importantly through this horrific experience, God showed me that no matter how bad things get He will always be there to pick me up and guide me through the fires of life.

Late Nights and Toilet Paper

A Narrative Essay By Nicole Magee

Homecoming week is, without a doubt, the most memorable week of the school year at Simpson Academy. For a few short days, the school's atmosphere changes into an enjoyable experience for its students. Each grade works diligently to create the perfect signs and chants that will help them earn the title of the "Most Spirited" class of the year. However, there is one competition that exceeds even the highest of school titles. Students recognize the true "winner" of homecoming week as the grade that rolls the most yards! Determined not to let my senior class lose this glorious competition, I chose to join forces with my fellow classmates for the first time in my life and go rolling.

As I waited to meet my friends, I noticed that the sky was darker than I had ever seen it in the past. This thought calmed my nerves as I realized that complete darkness would conceal our devious actions and, hopefully, save us from getting caught. A few moments later, two of my closest companions and I piled into my small car and headed to our first victim's house. Our greatest objective for the evening was to graciously leave our Honors English teacher, Mrs. Barbara Fuller, a yard completely covered with white toilet paper! On the way to her home in Mendenhall, I could feel the butterflies growing inside my stomach. While it was something that I knew I must try, I definitely did not want to get caught in that act! By the time we reached her driveway, I did not know if I was going to be able to actually take part in our little adventure. My hand went numb as I reached for the handle on my car door.

"I can't do this!" I told my friends, knowing that they thought I was a wimp.

"Nicole, we didn't drive all the way out here to sit in the car! It's our senior year! It's our last chance to do this kind of stuff!" My friend Brittany told me. As soon as I heard the words "senior year," I reached for two rolls of toilet paper; I was determined to have a rolling story of my own to share with others.

The next thirty minutes seemed to fly by as I busied myself wrapping Mrs. Fuller's fence with the toilet paper. When I had covered about half of the fence row, I heard a yell from down the hill near her house. I dropped the toilet paper on the ground and began sprinting towards my car, which was parked around the curve. My legs felt as though they were full of lead as I tried my hardest to shift them forward.

"Just keep moving," I thought to myself. "It can't be that much farther." After what seemed like an eternity, I saw the moon reflecting off the silver paint on my car. While fumbling for my keys, I heard someone running towards me. I was relieved when I realized it was my friend Brittney.

"Let's go!" she yelled at me as she yanked the car door open. I immediately put the car into drive and punched the gas pedal with my foot. When we finally caught our breath, we started laughing at ourselves for getting frightened so easily. We could not believe we had actually just rolled someone's home and gotten away with it! It was not until we were halfway down Mrs. Fuller's road that we realized there were only two of us in the car.

Looking up at each other at the same time, Brittney screamed, "Oh no! We forgot about Brittany!" I tapped my breaks to start slowing down; we had to go back and find her. In the glow of my break lights, I saw a tall figure chasing my vehicle, arms and legs flailing everywhere! As the car rolled to a stop, Brittany jumped in and started explaining how she had been chasing us for the last half of a mile. Once again, we all busted into laughter when she finished her story. What an interesting tale we would have to share with others about our first rolling adventure!

As for me, the memory of that night will never fade away. However, I am certain that in the future I will choose to skip any adventures that consist of late nights and toilet paper.

Illustrator: Christopher Wall

Ghost House

A Narrative Essay By Holly Roberts

Many years ago, I ventured into the woods behind my grandma's home with my cousins, James and Nathan. Fall was deemed as the perfect time for our adventure. The dark brown earth was littered with brown, red, and golden leaves. Copious evergreens and oak trees seemed to reach up and touch the sky as tiny patches of moss clung to a few trunks. The woods were not as spacious as we made it seem, though. We were small kids, after all, and it looked gigantic to us.

Not long after we entered the woods, we came across a small stream. Of course, I had to play in it for a while as James and Nathan determined where we would go from there. I let the clear, cool water dance through my fingers and even picked up a few slick rocks as souvenirs. After I finished playing in the stream, we headed west. All we found was tree after tree, an endless plain of trees. This adventure had begun to seem pointless.

"We should head back. There's nothing but trees and dead leaves!" I exclaimed out of frustration.

"Snakes, too!" said Nathan.

I thought he was only joking until I looked four feet ahead of us and saw the camouflaged reptile. Thankfully, my Border Collie, Lady, had tagged along and was busy herding us around the living obstacle as if we were a flock of defenseless sheep. After that, we were careful to watch our step and avoid all sticks that looked oddly snake-like.

The chirping birds seemed to mock our determination us as we ventured deeper still. Twigs snapped and leaves crunched under our feet as we trudged onward. Thirty minutes into our trip and there still seemed to be nothing of interest—at least not until James spotted an old house. We traveled towards the house, yet it seemed to shrink away from us. It was almost like we would never be able to reach it, the oasis in our desert of trees. Finally, we caught it, and it was not getting away.

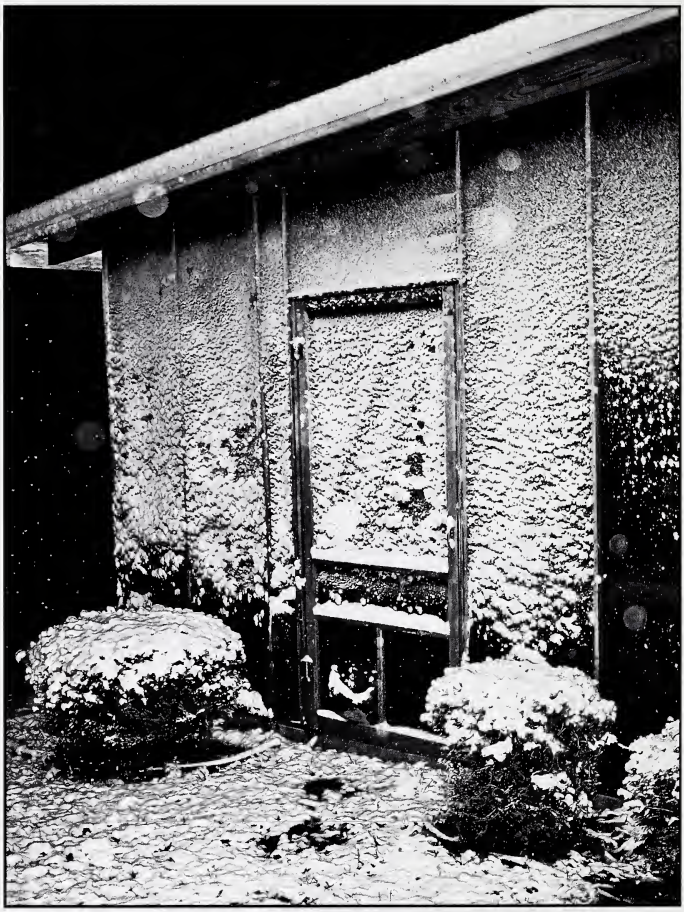
Up close, the house seemed to give off bad signals. It was a typical haunted house complete with peeling paint, rotting wood, a dilapidated roof, and an ominous looking knocker. Nathan and I dared James to go inside. Both of us knew we were too cowardly to think of doing such. Just before James ascended the steps, we saw something move past a dusty window and heard the floorboards creak from within. Needless to say, we bolted for our grandma's house as fast as our short legs could manage.

When we arrived, we immediately asked our grandma about the old

house.

"There is no house." she said with a worried look. "There isn't enough room for another."

After that cold fall day, we avoided those woods at all costs. I still have a sense of wariness for old houses because of this childhood expedition. Of course, when James and Nathan did decide to return and search for the house once more, it had seemingly vanished.



Photographer: Kim Singletary

Safety First

A Narrative Essay By Candace Laird

Exhausted, at seven years of age, I was reclining upon my bed in the hotel room which I, my mother, grandmother, and a family friend, Mrs. Brenda, shared. On this leg of our island-hopping vacation, we were touring Oahu, Hawaii. The four of us were unwinding before the evening's activities. Everything and everyone was peaceful. Silence permeated the room.

RING, RING, RING!! The resounding of a shrill alarm blared down the hallway to our room. Slowly, fear and anxiety crept its way through every nerve, muscle, and blood vessel of my body. The disturbance was an alarm (this much I knew), but I did not know what had activated it. Resulting from the rapidly increasing beats, my chest bulged and throbbed with each pulsation of my heart. Frantically, I glared at the adults in my room. Why were they just sitting there?

"Mama, what's happening? What is that?" I inquired of my mother.

"I don't know baby," she said, " but it isn't anything to worry about. They are probably just testing the alarms."

Suddenly, slamming doors, hurried footsteps, and high-pitched shouts filled the hallway. The air I was trying to inhale formed a blockage in my throat as I watched my mom walk to the door. After she opened the door, the scene before me heightened my fears. Zooming past the doorway were all the other guests on our floor heading for the exit. Mom, my grandmother, and Mrs. Brenda exchanged glances that I was unable to decipher.

"Candy, get your bag and put on your shoes; we have to go downstairs," my grandmother instructed. With trembling hands, I shakily complied. We then fled the room and merged into the stampede in the hall.

A multitude of people were descending the same darkened stairwell. With eyes over-flowing with tears, I clung to my mother's hand. Fervently, I prayed that we would make it to the lobby. I felt as if my legs were lead weights, and I tripped with every other step down the ten flights of stairs.

About three minutes later, seated in the lobby, we learned there had been no fire. A few kids on the floor above us had decided to play a prank by pulling the fire alarm. Had there been a fire, I realized, because of our hesitation, we would not have survived.

Peace and relaxation were the intended activities that summer afternoon. Instead, while on vacation in Hawaii, a life lesson presented itself. Following guidelines previously set for emergencies is extremely beneficial to individuals. Through this experience, I have learned the importance of fire safety rules.

The Differences Between Children Today and In Years Past

A Contrast Essay By Heather Davis

Parents and grandparents are infamous for beginning lessons with the words, "When I was a child…", then finishing with some tale that may sound completely surreal to the child they are talking to, such as walking to school up-hill both ways. They also try to impress on their children just how lucky they are to be growing up in the time they are, where there are so many new toys and things to do that were not around years ago. Most children today never actually pay their parents any attention during times like these, but their parents are correct. Although children today and in years past have some similarities in the ways they play, there are differences in their levels of imagination, their physical activity levels, and the locations in which they play.

When my parents were children, and even when I was a child, imagination was key to having fun while playing. Children played dress-up with old clothes and their parent's shoes, transforming themselves into royalty and movie stars, as if by magic. Old refrigerator boxes were prime real estate for making play-houses if a child could get his hands on such a hot commodity, and children would amuse themselves for hours on end by creating their own games to play together.

Now, however, imagination has taken a backseat to other things for having fun. Toy manufacturers have stolen children's need to be creative and amuse themselves. Pre-fabricated costumes have taken the place of old clothing in games of dress-up, ensuring that children are carbon-copies of their intended personas; no use of imagination is required. Plastic, fully equipped play-houses have replaced refrigerator boxes, stunting a child's creative growth by providing all the goods needed to play "house" instead of allowing the child to create his own. Also, why would children fabricate their own styles of nonsense games when video game providers have flooded the world with ready-made games that promise hours of amusement?

Years ago, children could be seen participating in all types of physical activities to pass the time. Children on bicycles could be found in any given neighborhood, zooming back and forth, pedaling to their hearts' content and working up a sweat playing physical games such as freeze tag. In addition, jumping on trampolines and swinging on swing-sets were seen as exceptional ways to pass a lazy Sunday afternoon. Today, children try their hardest to avoid physical activities to pass their time and find amusement.

The use of ATV's and other motorized vehicles allow children to travel about without exerting themselves more than is strictly necessary, unlike bicycles. Many prefer sitting and playing video games or watching television, like giant couch potatoes, to running around exerting themselves for long periods of time. What child today would not prefer to hunt for clues on a video game, which only requires him to burn enough energy to move his fingers over the buttons of a remote, instead of physically running around searching of another person in a game of hide-and-go-seek, where he would have to chase his friend until both parties were hot, sweaty, and out of breath? Now, a lazy Sunday afternoon is just that, with children doing as little as they can get away with.

In times past, children sported dark, golden tans, especially during the summer, showcasing their love for being outdoors. Running through the woods or swimming in a lake or swimming pool were preferred pastimes for the summer months, and an offer to camp under the stars was never turned down. Then, in the winter months, parents practically had to tackle their children on the way out of the house to get them into cold weather gear. Not even the most adverse winter weather conditions could keep children out of the winter wonderland outside of their houses where many enjoyed building snowmen and making snow angels.

Recently, however, children are leaning more toward spending their time indoors somewhere, instead of out and about in their neighborhood. Children are spoiled to the comforts of the indoors. Houses now have air conditioning, keeping the rooms just the right temperature to keep children happy during the summer and winter. This modern convenience makes children question, "Why would I want to battle the elements, the mosquitoes, and the heat when I can just stay indoors where it is cool and pest free?"

Circumstances have certainly changed over the years, changing the way children play. Advancements in technology and home comforts, as well as toy companies that capitalize on parents who do not emphasize the use of imagination, have forever shaped the manners in which children play. So, though children are essentially the same as they were in years past, the ways in which location of play, imagination, and physical activity factor into playtime are immensely different than they were in the past.

Lovingly Storms

A Comparison Essay By Cheyenne Remae Ward

Love is arguably the most sought after feeling in the world. People from every background, ethnicity, race, and gender go through extreme measures in search of their one true love. Love has a lot in common with storms. True love is like the perfect storm in that they both require certain components to exist, are challenging to undergo, and have a rewarding end result.

Everything throughout life, ranging from a person's bodily cells to the car that one might drive, is made up of many specific components. Love and storms also require certain elements. Not every person can fall in love, and certainly not with each person he or she begins a relationship with. Sometimes the two people are complete opposites; other times, they could not be more alike. They may meet at a young age or, perhaps, after being previously married and divorced with children of their own. On the other hand, the perfect storm is far more detailed when it comes to the components needed. The time of day, season of the year, geographical elements, and especially temperature, all play an extremely important role in creating such a storm. Every little detail matters when finding true love or creating the perfect storm.

Another way love and storms are alike is that both are somewhat challenging to endure. Searching for whom someone is meant to spend his or her entire life with is a difficult task. The majority of the hardships are defeated once a person finds that true love. However, maintaining a healthy relationship is also a challenge at times. One may find it easier to give up instead of work out certain problems faced throughout the relationship. The perfect storm would be testing to go through as well. When the conditions are correct, a storm can destroy vehicles, homes, buildings, and even lives. Usually the worst storms come without warning, so one has no time to prepare for the damage that is often caused. The aftermath of such a horrible storm and the effects of finding one's true love are exceptionally gratifying.

The rewards of persisting through each challenge are far more rewarding than one person could ever imagine. For example, the sky after such a damaging storm usually appears as the clearest, bluest skies throughout the year—often with the sun shining brightly with a few clouds dotted throughout the atmosphere. Two people, soul-mates, finding one another after many relentless years of being apart, would undeniably agree that persisting through each painful experience of their past was well worth the

struggle to bring them to where they are today.

It is hard to say that individuals will find their one true love in their life. It is even more of a challenge to suggest that one will make it through every storm faced. The components that are required, the challenges that each may contain, and the rewards that are received are all coinciding with each other when it comes to true love and the perfect storm.

Photographer: Kim Singletary

Living with a Spouse

An Effect Essay By Glenda Cavalier

What is love? I asked that question a lot when I was growing up and on into young adulthood. I honestly could not define it for myself, and when I asked my friend, Chip, what he thought it was, he replied, "Love is a decision…to commit, to respect, to care for, to take care about…you know, to make a decision to love is more about the mind than the heart." Wow! I liked that answer so much that I married him. That was seventeen years ago, and we are still making the decision to love one another. Sometimes I have to redefine my decision daily, or even hourly, depending on the argument, but I always come back to the original question, and the original answer still makes me smile.

I have learned so much about love and about what it takes to make a relationship endure. The truth is I doubted that I had what it took to commit to another human being. I, like most people, am self-centered, and the thought of having to share my life with another person seemed rather bothersome. I have learned, though, that when a person loves another person the way I love my husband, sharing comes easily. Commitment is a huge word, full of expectations and grandeur. In its simplest terms, however, it is not as scary. I commit to share the sink, the closet, the phone, the car and on and on and on. Before living with my spouse, I did not know how to share. For me, it was a painful process of tug of war for the first year or two. After the second year, it began to get easier. Now, so many years later, it is second nature. I cannot imagine a day going by without thinking of his needs right along with my own.

Respect has always been an easy thing for me to give. My grandmother told me before I married that I should always have praise on my lips for my husband, particularly in public. I do not know why that meant so much to me, but it did. That statement may have been the most valuable thing my grandmother gave to me. After seventeen years of marriage, I understand it more clearly. It is like when someone is feeling sad, and a person walks up to him or her and tells a joke that makes him or her laugh. Suddenly, he or she feels less sad. Their circumstance has not changed, only their attitude, no matter how brief the shift. There have been times in my marriage that I wanted to shout from every rooftop in town that my husband had really made me angry! Each time, however, I can hear my grandmother's advice, and something inside of me stirs. When I speak highly of my husband, I remind myself that although I am angry and although my circumstance has not changed, my attitude can. I choose to write about it

in my journal instead. Sometimes, I write about my anger in a letter to him, and sometimes I just let it go. I know that if I let it fester, and I perpetuate my anger by bad mouthing him to my family or friends, then I allow my respect for him as a person to diminish, not only in my heart, but in the hearts of others. I think respecting another person with words truly leads to respect in works as well.

I have had the most difficult time with the last decision on my list. I did not know how to be taken care of. When I was growing up, I took care of myself. I learned to be quite self-sufficient and, in addition, took great pride in that aspect of my personality. The few times I depended on another human being to take care of me, I felt horribly disappointed. I do not know how old I was when I decided that I could be happier without help from others, but I know I was very young. When I married my husband at the age of twenty-four and he suggested that we get a joint checking account, I found that horrifying. It was certainly a trust issue. I did it, though. A year after we were married, I lost my job, and he did take care of me financially for two years after that. I was amazed. Anxiously, I waited for him to wipe out the checking account and hit the road, yet he did not do that. After the birth of our first child, I suffered with post-partum depression. I cried for hours on end. What should have been the happiest days of my life were filled with confusion and sadness. Ashamed and fearful, I could not bring myself to tell anyone of the way I felt. However, he knew me, and he knew that I was not well. He never said an unkind word; he held me and assured me that I would be all right. The next day, he took me to the doctor and made sure that the doctor took care of me. I was certain that my husband would not understand and that he would be disgusted by what I thought was weakness. Instead, he took care of me, and he did it freely. The amounts of times that I have had to lean on my husband for support are numerous. Each time I do, I grow as a person. I have learned to take care of him by allowing him to take care of me.

Living with a spouse has given me purpose and strength I never knew was possible. Marriage has shown me abilities in myself and others that I doubted would ever be a reality. Each day that I honor my decision to commit, respect, and take care of my husband is a good day.

The Effects of Cellular Phones on Society

An Effect Essay By Heather Davis

Because of the way technology seems to grow in leaps and bounds, America seems to be moving at the speed of light. Advancements in technology have also allowed the American people to communicate with one another with the use of compact, mobile cellular phones. It seems like nearly every day a new, smaller, faster phone with better capabilities becomes available, making it even easier for people to stay connected, no matter where they may be. The smaller the phone, the easier it becomes to travel with it, and the more capabilities a phone has, the easier it is for people to communicate with one another. In a world where everyone is spoiled to instant gratification, it has become socially acceptable to talk and text-message nearly anywhere, especially in places people should not, such as while they are with family members or friends, in public places, and while completing tasks that should require a person's full attention.

Consequently, many people virtually "two-time" their families and friends by talking to other people the entire time they are together. Family dinners lose their merit as invaluable tools for communication and building relationships within families. With parents on business calls or children constantly text-messaging their friends, family members are left in their own private worlds, rather than talking to one another. Also, friends often feel less important or less interesting if a person is always on the phone with someone else while they are together, creating alienation within a group of friends. A person's friends may decide that pursuing a friendship with them is not worth the effort if they constantly have to compete for their friend's attention.

All common courtesy for the feelings of strangers in public places who do not care to hear about the in's and out's of another person's life has become a casualty to people blabbing about their personal struggles in places wide open to the world at large. As a result of this assault on public places, a lovely dinner in a nice restaurant can be quickly soured by an inconsiderate person talking on a cellular phone at the next table. Also, the appeal of a nice, quiet movie at the local cinema can be tremendously tarnished by the stage-whispered words of someone talking on the phone or an unfortunate ringer during the climax of the movie. Even the phone lights from people text-messaging can be an unwanted distraction while watching a movie. Furthermore, doctor's offices and hospitals, places that should be sanctuaries for the ill and injured from the loud, obnoxious outside world, are not immune to the plague of cellular phones. In waiting

rooms, people who feel horrible to begin with are bombarded by people waiting, passing their time by talking, usually much too loudly, to someone else over a cellular phone. Patient rooms are not even free of cellular phones, leaving doctors to be needlessly interrupted during examinations or patients to be momentarily ignored while a doctor answers a call from a significant other.

Talking and text-messaging are also popping up during activities that should require a person's full attention. For example, talking and text-messaging while driving leaves motorists completely distracted from the task at hand, slowing their response times and leaving them more likely to have a wreck than a person who is under the influence of alcohol. Additionally, workers who smuggle in the use of their personal cellular phones at the workplace make the working environment much less professional, and workers who are always using their cellular phones at work are much less efficient and work less quickly than those not preoccupied with things that are happening outside of work. Likewise, students who use cellular phones to text-message while in class and while completing assignments become distracted from what is the most important, putting forth their best effort. Because of this lapse in judgment, their grades suffer.

Just because the members of society are able to slide a cellular phone into their pocket to use anywhere and anytime they want to, does not mean that they should. Everyone should try to abide by the rules of common courtesy and be discreet with their cellular phone usage. Not every place and situation in the world is suitable for a cellular phone conversation of whatever kind. Leaps in technology should not allow the American people to be constantly connected. We should not stay unceasingly connected through the use of cellular phones.

My Friend: The Dory Story

A Definition Essay By Nicole Magee

When I think back to my earliest childhood memories of elementary school, there are certain situations and people that I vividly recollect because they made such an impact on my young life. One of the few classmates I distinctly remember is now my best friend, Brittany Smith. Of course, she has changed much since then, or we would not be the close companions we are today. In fact, her personality has evolved from the Cruella Deville of my class to the character Dory from the movie Finding Nemo. That bossy, bitter, evil little girl is now one of the funniest, most lovable people I know. Dory's forgetful conscious, entertaining attitude, and loyal friendships with others portray her as a fish worth befriending, which is exactly why my friend Brittany is an excellent illustration of her.

Throughout Finding Nemo, Dory suffers from short-term memory loss, which gets her into all kinds of exciting and frightening adventures. I have often said that my friend Brittany would misplace her head if it was not properly attached to the rest of her body; she is just as forgetful as Dory, if not more. Simple tasks such as finishing sentences, recalling previous things she has done, and remembering other people's names are extremely hard for her to successfully achieve. Brittany daily misplaces things and gets lost even in her most common surroundings. Like Dory, she is often labeled by others as a "ditz"; however, Brittany somehow always manages to remember the most important things in life that get her through to the next stage of her journey.

Another strikingly noticeable shift in Brittany's personality traits took place when she became the "entertainer" of all the events in which she participates. Just like Dory, Brittany is always the center of attention everywhere she goes. Whether it is a rowdy sporting event or a serene church service, there is no doubt that everyone else in attendance is aware of her presence. Her voice is unique, loud, and can be easily recognized in a crowd of noisy people. She is always bubbly and joyful with an extraordinary smile that covers her entire face; Brittany's laugh develops somewhere deep inside her, which she bustles out in high-pitched, drawn-out shrills. As the "life of the party," Brittany is often called upon to be the tag-along in various situations. People enjoy her company and desire to have her addictive personality rub off on them. I believe few people, with the exception of Dory, will ever be as entertaining as Brittany.

The final and most beneficial change Brittany has made that resembles Dory is her new approach towards friendships. Someone who was once heartless now knows every single detail about me. She is truly my very best and closest friend. Brittany is always supporting and encouraging me through each battle I face in life. She may not know the exact words to say or the best way to handle the situation at hand, but she has never failed to listen to my complaints and dry my tears. Brittany has been there when it seemed as if everyone else had given up on me. We have laughed together, cried together, and made memories that I shall cherish forever. Her loyal friendship has been such a blessing to my life. I am so happy to have her as a true friend, just as Dory was to all the other characters in Finding Nemo.

Over the years, my friend Brittany has blossomed from a cold-hearted version of Cruella Deville to a loving illustration of Dory. She has made much progress towards being a positive influence in my life and in the lives of others. Her life story, just like Dory's, will surely be a successful one.

Photographer: Kellie Brady

My Dad, the Smiley

A Definition Essay By Amanda J. Mosley

In my childhood days, my dad was a very negative person. He never seemed to be happy or have a good time wherever he was. When something bad would happen, he would have a meltdown and get depressed. When he lost his job when I was eight years old, he got so depressed that he would not speak to anyone, even my mom. Every Christmas he could not get into the happy mood and moped around the house all season. That was years ago, and now he is a totally different person. He became a "smiley." A "smiley" is a person who sees a positive outcome in any situation. Smileys see the "silver lining" in any problem, no matter how bad it is. My dad is one of very few people who has this wonderful, and sometimes irritating, gift.

A smiley always has a smile on his or her face, rain or shine. My dad, for example, always has something to smile about. For instance, Dad came home one day and was telling my mom that he lost his work keys. He said he never found them and that he had to use his boss's set of keys. Throughout telling his story of this terrible ordeal, he never stopped smiling. When I asked him why he was so happy, he told me he could have lost his truck keys instead, and then he would not have been able to come home. The only time when Dad is not smiling is in his sleep. Although, once I thought I saw him grin for a second before he started snoring again.

Being a smiley has allowed my dad to become much healthier and stress free. There is nothing that can get my dad stressed out anymore. He never seems to worry about the small things. Since becoming a smiley, Dad's health has greatly improved. Being in such a good mood all the time, Dad cooks more, and of course, he does it with a smile. This has resulted in better blood sugar levels because he eats at home. His blood pressure and cholesterol levels have never been so good in his entire life. Before he became a smiley, he looked washed out and was tired all the time. Indeed, being a smiley has greatly improved his outlook on life.

Since Dad's transformation into a smiley, he has never met a stranger. Within minutes, his smile and newly-changed personality will capture anyone's heart. Everywhere Dad goes, people wave and say hello. Dad says he does not know them, but he waves anyway and talks to them like they are his friends. Once a disgruntled customer was having an argument with his wife and proceeded to take out his anger on my dad. Dad handled the situation with ease, and before the man left, he and my dad were talking together like

old friends. Only a true smiley can make an enemy into a friend.

Dad has come a long way from a deep depression and negative attitude to an optimistic, happy-go-lucky guy with a huge smile on his face. Being a smiley has lead to many positive effects on his life. I do not miss the old way he used to be. I am happy he made this change, and I would not want him any other way.

Illustrator: Christopher Wall

A Man of Constant Sorrow

A Literary Analysis By Jason Giangrosso

It seems as if some people in this world just cannot stay away from trouble. This is especially true for the main character of the 2000 adventure film O Brother, Where Art Thou?, which follows Ulysses Everett McGill and his two partners in crime as they break away from their prison sentence and begin a search for a treasure. Although Everett believes his journey will not be too difficult, he quickly finds out that will be filled with many obstacles, such as the many colorful people whom he encounters and his many run-ins with the law, which sometimes makes his voyage seem as if it is impossible. Although Everett has his heart in the right place, it seems as if he can never escape trouble.

Everett's first name automatically relates him to the main character of Homer's epic Odyssey, Ulysses, who went on a long, incredible, and nearly impossible expedition. In fact, the movie even begins with a quote from the popular epic. Like Ulysses, Everett finds himself in trouble often. The best example of this from the movie was when Everett and his two companions, Pete and Delmar, became intoxicated by the singing of three beautiful women who are bathing in a river. This brings Everett trouble when Pete turns up missing. Believing that he is now a frog, Everett continues his journey with Delmar. This scene is relatable to Odyssey because Ulysses also faces beautiful women who entice him into trouble, such as singing sirens who have to capability of drowning men, a goddess who plans to keep Ulysses from his journey, and a witch who wishes to turn all men into beasts. Another parallel between the two pieces of work is that Everett has to fight off his wife's suitor, much like Ulysses had to fight off many of his wife's suitors. Although both main characters are tempted into trouble, they prevail and continue their journeys.

Most of the people that Everett encounters on his expedition seem to put him in peril danger of his family, friends, reputation, and life. The first troublesome character Everett and his gang come across his Pete's cousin. Looking to collect a bounty, Pete's cousin decides to call the sheriff to come arrest Everett and his pals, which they narrowly escape. Other dangerous characters that Everett meets up with include a bank robber, who actually helps the trio one night by leaving them with a bag of money; the sheriff, who attempts to capture him and kill him; a "Bible salesman" who attacks Everett and Delmar, kills the frog they thought was Pete, and robs them; and Vernon T. Waldrip, a man who has become engaged to

Everett's wife and threatens to tear his family apart. These characters make Everett's journey long and difficult, and sometimes they force him to wonder whether or not he should have escaped from prison. Although these antagonists make Everett's story more interesting, they also allow for him to become a better friend, leader, husband, and father.

Everett's troubled life eventually benefits himself and his comrades. When Everett's trio became in desperate need of money, they record a song in order to earn some money. The song is titled "Man of Constant Sorrows," which perfectly describes what Everett's past and his future. What Everett and his friends did not know was that their song would become a music chart-topper that would ultimately gain them an entertainment job for the governor. This song helps Everett deal with his troubled life, get pardoned for his crimes, and gain back his family. Therefore, it seems as if Everett's troubles were really blessings in disguises.

Trouble is something that everyone faces in their life, and in the movie O Brother, Where Art Thou?, it adds much humor and helps change the main character for the better. In the end, Everett has his family back and he has a good-paying career, giving the moviegoer a feeling that he can survive anything the world throws his way, even if he is a man of constant sorrow.

Illustrator: Christopher Wall

O Brother, Where Art Thou?

A Literary Analysis By Ira Motley

O Brother, Where Art Thou, is an adventurous tale directed by Joel Coen. It is easily one of the best films of this decade. The film is about Ulysses Everett McGill, who embarks on an incredible adventure. Also joining Everett are Pete and Delmar. Everett tells them of a treasure to seek with him, but Everett is really trying to stop his ex-wife from getting remarried. The film is wonderfully directed and uses many elements of cinematography to express the somewhat dark, ominous theme of the film.

One element the director uses in the film is panning a scene. The director did this to emphasize the background, but also to show the characters in the uniquely recreated 1930's Mississippi. The most noticeable scene where the director uses this technique is near the end of the film when Everett is walking with Penny and his daughters. The camera pans by a building painted as if it were a street. As they walk by, we see beautiful background which is enhanced by that technique.

Another cinematic technique used by the director is a cutaway. When using cutaways, other perspectives can be put into one shot. Cutaways do not usually add to the dramatic content of the film, but it adds a degree of complexity. The best example of this is when Pete is captured by Sheriff Cooley. Different shots of Pete, Sheriff Cooley, the hound, and the noose are put together using cutaways. This technique gives the scene complex layers that focus on Pete's fear of being hanged.

The best element of cinematography used by the director was the close-up shot. Close-ups can be used many ways and for different reasons. The close-ups in this film focused on emotion and intricate detail of certain objects. Some examples are the close-up shots of Sheriff Cooley's sunglasses. There are several close-ups of flames reflecting in his sunglasses, and he is referenced as being the devil many times throughout the film. The best example is when Everett prays to God to save them from Sheriff Cooley. This close-up shot captured Everett's emotions perfectly.

Several elements of cinematography were used to convey specific feelings and emotions from the characters, as well as the mood of the film. While the film was somewhat dark, it was also light-hearted at times. The characters' interactions were very memorable, and this film will be a classic for years to come.

Silence is Golden

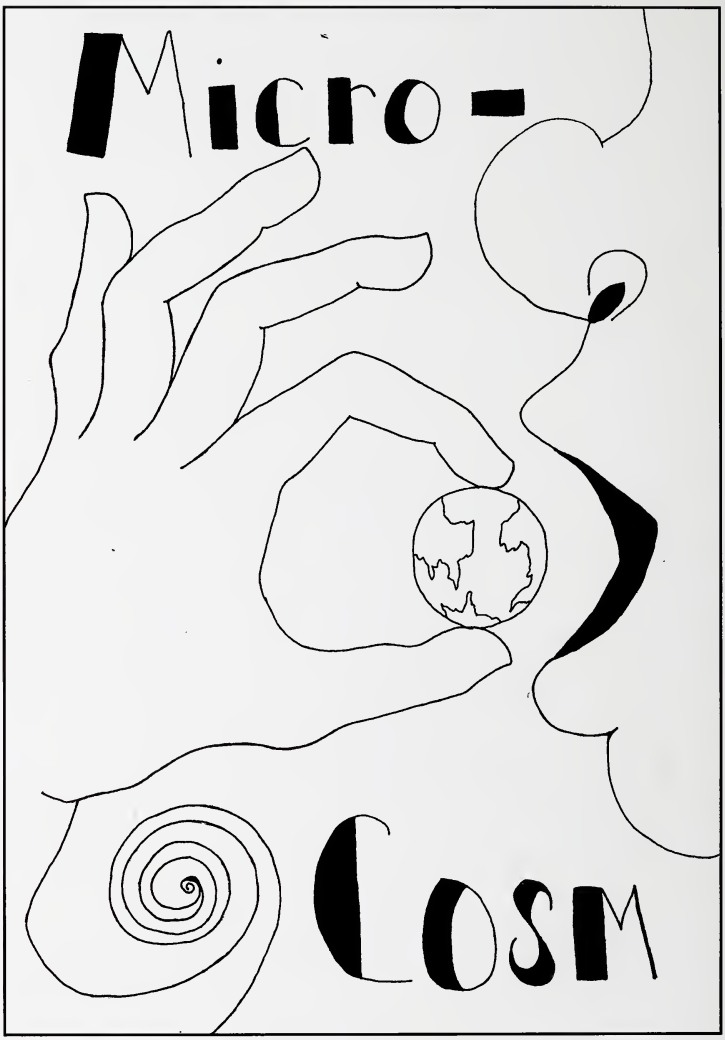
An Illustration Essay By Evette Williams

I believe in the beauty of silence. Silence is golden but it also is underrated; it is fragile because it can be broken even if a pen drops. It is also powerful because it can be used as a weapon or as a tool. For me personally, I hate using it as a weapon because it is just so awkward and easily broken by even scoffing or slamming a door. It is most definitely better used as a tool, or better yet, as a principle. Everyone that knows the blessing of hearing definitely takes for granted the perfection of just being silent. I do not think most people could imagine even a few hours with no television, music, talking, background noise, crunching food and rattling bags, opening doors, or computer motors. What most people see as silence is only pseudo-silence.

I did not realize how hard true silence was to achieve until I was forced to share a dorm hall with girls who clearly have never heard of time for personal reflection, deep thought, and creativity, or God forbid, studying! Maybe they think that they are doing the world a favor by offering their mindless banter and sharing their taste in ringtones and music, or maybe they think that silence is a bit boring and eerie. Perhaps, I am uptight, but I doubt that since I am the one asked at home to shut up when my love of singing and rambling about my thoughts gets annoying. Unlike some people, however, I know how to cut off life's soundtrack in respect to others.

There is nothing worse than having unwanted noise when all I want is some silence. It seems the moment I realize I want some quiet time, that is when everyone wants to knock on my door. If it is not unwanted or inconvenient company, it is the train that decides to strut by every once in a while, or the intruding overhead announcements, or the vacuum, or the microwave. The worst sound has to be the mini fridge that insists on moaning and groaning at night while my sister and I are trying to sleep.

I am not one of those people who wants utter white silence, but I do appreciate that perfect day when the only sounds made are from the wind rustling the drying leaves of autumn, the turn of a page in a book, a soft, thoughtful sigh, a gentle giggle that only the person laughing understands, and the sound of my own voice in my head. Clean thought is something worth having once in a while. There is one thing I never take for granted because now I truly understand that noise is overrated. Silence is truly golden.



Illustrator: Kristen Gardner